

In January 1968, the popular film magazine *Eiga Geijutsu* (Film art) published a dialogue—sensationally titled “Fascist or Revolutionary?”—between Oshima Nagisa, an acclaimed cinéaste and critic-representative of Japanese New Wave cinema, and Mishima Yukio, a renowned novelist who was to stage a failed coup d’état and ritual suicide as a spectacular media event two years later. The dialogue is intriguing not so much because it suggests a rare point of agreement between Oshima and Mishima, who are considered to stand at opposing ends of the spectrum of political activism (the antinationalist Left and the ultranationalist Right). Rather, the dialogue is fascinating because it highlights their shared interest in television and, more broadly, in the political effects of televisually induced media events. Oshima and Mishima concur that the New Left generation of Japanese student protesters are the children of television whose political actions are deeply conditioned by the ubiquitous presence of the news camera. Oshima calls this media-conscious form of student protest an “expressive act” akin to an artistic performance. Mishima criticizes this view by noting that the substitution of political action by the expressive act attests to the bleakness of the television age in which they all live. Oshima, in contrast, regards this blurring of the boundary between artistic performance and political action in a positive light, suggesting that the very meaning of politics and art should be rethought in light of this situation.¹

Oshima and Mishima were not alone in remarking on the media consciousness of student protesters during the so-called season of politics

(*seiji no kisetsu*) that erupted in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Various factions of student protesters allegedly chose the colors of their ubiquitous construction helmets (worn during protests) based on how they would look on color television.² Both the dialogue and this anecdote point to the increasing imbrication of politics and media in Japan, to which the rise and consolidation of television greatly contributed. The season of politics, which coincided with the golden era of leftist independent and avant-garde filmmaking practices, was, in effect, the season of *image* politics.

Oshima's call to redefine politics and art in light of the media-conscious student protesters also sheds light on a little-studied aspect of Japanese political avant-garde filmmaking in the 1960s: the tension between journalistic media and cinema that became visible against the backdrop of intensifying image politics. During the 1960s, the proximity between cinema and journalism gained wide attention from critics and filmmakers. Political avant-garde filmmakers started to approximate—or, more precisely, to appropriate—television and other journalistic media forms. This avant-gardist appropriation of journalism marks an important but overlooked tendency within postwar Japanese cinema. The timely appropriation of sensational news, high-profile media events, and other topical images widely circulating in the press by filmmakers such as Oshima Nagisa, Matsumoto Toshio, Wakamatsu Kōji, and Adachi Masao in the 1960s and early 1970s points to a collectively shared concern with journalistic actuality. For the sake of clarity, I will call this body of films the “cinema of actuality.” The spectacular terrain of sensational newsmaking and media events in particular attracted these avant-garde filmmakers, but their appropriation of journalism was not a simple reversion back to cinema's early social function as a “visual newspaper.”³ Instead, the journalistic production of spectacular and sensational news became a complex site of calculated appropriations and critical experimentations in the 1960s, as these Japanese avant-garde filmmakers grappled with the intertwined questions of how to radicalize cinema in light of the escalating mediatization of politics and how to situate cinema within a rapidly changing media environment.⁴ The appearance of the cinema of actuality was hence an extremely timely response to profound changes occurring in the Japanese media sphere.

Although these filmmakers belong to the generation of cinéastes who have been subsumed under the category of New Wave, not all of

the so-called New Wave filmmakers contributed to the cinema of actuality.⁵ Likewise, the filmmakers whose works I analyze in this book have affinities with underground and lesser-known experimental filmmakers, such as Jōnouchi Motoharu, Okabe Michio, and Kanai Katsu, who do not appear in most studies of the Japanese New Wave. I hence eschew the clichéd label *New Wave* in favor of the term *political avant-garde* in describing the filmmakers whose works form the cinema of actuality. The term *political avant-garde* acknowledges the permeability between commercial and underground forms of filmmaking—a permeability that is erased by the term *New Wave*.⁶ Their common strategies of appropriating and recycling current, topical, and often sensational materials culled from the realm of journalism should also be read against the historical situation of the 1960s, a decade marked by a seemingly endless series of televised assassinations, hijackings, hostage crises, and mass street protests. My argument is that cinema—itself an apparatus of spectacle—became a testing ground for the reflexive critique of media spectacle precisely at this moment in Japan. Central to my analysis is the changing conception of cinema in relation to television and other image-based media; this change is registered by the rising intermedia consciousness among the filmmakers whose works form the cinema of actuality.

THE JOURNALISTIC TURN

The journalistic turn of political avant-garde filmmakers in the 1960s is exemplified by the increased discursive currency of a loan word: *akuchuaritii* (actuality). This term started to widely circulate in the Japanese discourses on film, photography, television, and literature during the late 1950s and became one of the key concepts used to discuss the political efficacy of art throughout the 1960s. The broad range of connotations (topicality, newsworthiness, currentness, contemporary relevance, and factuality) attached to the term *actuality* is integral to understanding why journalism became an object of critique for filmmakers concerned with the political efficacy of cinema. Another key term that entered the Japanese film-theoretical discourse during this period was *eizō* (image), which gained currency around the same time as the journalistic concept of actuality began to circulate among avant-garde circles. The term *eizō* was often invoked in order to articulate cinema's relation to television, the newly dominant medium that gen-

erated strong sensations of actuality. The concurrent proliferation of discourses on the image and actuality attests to a historical correlation between these two concepts as well as to the impact of television.

Not surprisingly, these intertwined discourses on the image and actuality arose when the Japanese film industry itself was undergoing a significant restructuring. Since the late 1950s, television had steadily eclipsed cinema as a prime source of entertainment, bringing about the fast decline of the vertically integrated Japanese film industry. The disintegration of the industry, as the narrative goes, in turn enabled small independent production companies to flourish in the 1960s. This decade thus came to be known as the golden age of independent cinema, a decade marked by an outburst of experimental and avant-garde film productions. The establishment in 1961 of the Art Theatre Guild (ATG)—a unique production, distribution, and exhibition company exclusively dedicated to the dissemination of art cinema—was emblematic of these institutional changes.⁷ Almost all the filmmakers whose works are analyzed in this book exhibited their films at the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka or its underground counterpart, Theatre Scorpio (Sasori-za). Named after Kenneth Anger's experimental film *Scorpio Rising* (1964) by none other than Mishima, Theatre Scorpio was an epicenter of Japan's underground film culture and a hotspot for avant-garde theater, experimental music, and intermedia performances. Located below Shinjuku Bunka in Tokyo, this clandestine basement art space hosted lively discussions on politics and art, and fostered close collaborations among filmmakers, musicians, photographers, performance artists, and playwrights. A growing number of intermedial experiments that defied conventional boundaries between different media emerged directly from this social and cultural milieu.

This rough sketch of the sociocultural context of the 1960s that gave rise to the cinema of actuality, however, is perhaps not complete without a few additional remarks. One such element is the transfer of the principal production site of visual news from the film industry to the television industry. During the 1930s, newsreel theaters specializing in newsreels, short animations, and documentary films flourished in Japan. Major national newspaper companies, such as Asahi, Yomiuri, and Mainichi used to dominate the production of newsreels, with each running its own film production company regularly supplying newsreel theaters with their products. Major studios such as Shōchiku also began producing and marketing newsreels or visual newspapers (*me no shin-*

bun) as early as 1930.⁸ In the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the same newspaper companies shifted their focus and investment from film to television, while continuing to exert control over the journalistic sphere of news production.⁹ Television gradually replaced newsreel theaters as the principal channel of disseminating visual news. The cinematic engagement with the sensation of actuality that emerged in the 1960s was, arguably, a response to this shift. Before the rise of television, cinema was a privileged medium for capturing the moment: it was *the* visual medium of actuality. Yet the rapid development of news shows on television, along with the postwar restructuring of the film industry with its emphasis on program pictures based on the star system, significantly weakened cinema's association with actuality. The journalistic turn of political avant-garde filmmaking during the 1960s came after this rupture, which severed cinema's affinity with news journalism. In this regard this journalistic turn was, partly, a gesture of *return* to the original fascination with the sensation of actuality that cinema used to impart in the early days.

A number of seminal theoretical texts on the mass media and television were also translated into Japanese during the 1960s. For instance, Daniel J. Boorstin's influential text, *The Image: Or What Happened to the American Dream?* (1962), appeared in translation in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics, which boosted the nationwide sale of television sets. The following year the first translation of Walter Benjamin's texts appeared, including his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which came out in print three years prior to its English translation. Marshall McLuhan's 1964 bestseller, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, was translated in 1967, accelerating the so-called McLuhan boom in Japan, and stirring passionate debates on the relation between contemporary art and mass media.¹⁰ But if these newly translated texts found enthusiastic receptions from critics and artists in Japan, it is because these readers already were familiar with many of the theoretical issues articulated in these texts. Among my aims in this book is to present the theoretical and discursive context of debates around the image that preceded and accompanied the translations of such texts, and that prepared the way for their wide reception.

The focus on the discursive context points to another intervention I hope to make: to shed light on the important relationship between theory and practice among political avant-garde filmmakers of the time. There is an enduring misconception of Japanese film culture, namely

the assumption that “the very notion of theory is alien to Japan; it is considered a property of Europe and the West,” to invoke Noël Burch’s memorable statement.¹¹ Even today, the term *theory* within film studies predominantly—and almost exclusively—refers to theoretical writings penned by European and North American critics and scholars, as is evident in the focus of numerous anthologies bearing the words “Film Theory” in their title. Yet there is irony in this exclusivity. For one, Japanese cinema played a significant role in the development of the film theory that emerged in the 1960s and the 1970s (also called 70s film theory or screen theory). Japanese cinema, as Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto notes, was instrumental at this formative stage of film studies as a discipline in North America. Some of the canonical texts of this film theory drew heavily on the work of Japanese filmmakers such as Ozu and Oshima.¹² The critical role Oshima’s work played is especially visible in influential texts such as Stephen Heath’s “Narrative Space” (1976).¹³ In spite of such accrued interests in Japanese cinema in the 1970s, however, rich theoretical discussions on the cinema that Oshima and his contemporaries generated have not received due attention.¹⁴

Disproving Burch’s claim before the fact, many of the avant-garde filmmakers at the time also thought of themselves as theorists. And their writings, published in numerous film journals (*Kiroku Eiga*, *Eiga Hyōron*, *Eiga Hihyō*, *Eizō Geijutsu*, and so on), were in close conversation with the filmmaking practices of the time. This is particularly true in the case of someone like Matsumoto, who spearheaded the experimental film and video art scene of the 1960s and 1970s. Matsumoto’s first book, *Discovery of the Image: Avant-garde and Documentary* (*Eizō no hakken: Avangyarudo to dokyumentarii*, 1963) had a wide-reaching impact on his contemporaries, including Oshima, his greatest rival, and on the following generation of experimental filmmakers, such as Adachi, Jōnouchi, and others who congregated around the VAN Film Research Center (a filmmaking collective formed by former student filmmakers from Nihon University). Similarly, we cannot overlook the equally influential role played by an earlier generation of leftist intellectuals like Hanada Kiyoteru in inspiring the postwar generation of political avant-garde filmmakers. Matsumoto, Oshima, Adachi, and others took seriously Hanada’s call to synthesize the avant-garde and documentary arts, and they also consciously inherited the activist notion of the “movement” (*undō*) that Hanada’s cohort of avant-garde artists advocated in the 1950s. The activist edge of political avant-garde filmmaking that

arose against the intense mediatization of student movements was further sharpened by the participation of activist-theorists like Matsuda Masao. Furthermore, the discursive attempt to theorize cinema in relation to politics at this time was paralleled by similar efforts in the adjacent field of photography. For instance, the work of the photographer-critic Nakahira Takuma—a co-founder of the influential photography group and magazine *Provoke*—should be read as a part of the dialogue with filmmakers and critics, such as Adachi and Matsuda. What unites the writings of these critics, filmmakers, and photographers is their shared concern with the actuality of the image and the political force of the mediatized spectacle.

THE POLITICS OF THE SPECTACLE

Indeed, this discursive milieu that brought together a number of intellectuals, filmmakers, and photographers was profoundly affected by the intensifying production of media spectacles that reconfigured the perception of politics as such. As Mishima and Oshima rightly recognized, student revolutionaries were children of the television age who learned to stage their political dissent for the camera. This deepening imbrication of politics and the media suggested that the image itself was fast becoming the very locus of political struggle. Nakahira's 1972 essay "The Document Called Illusion" ("Kiroku to iu gen'ei"), for instance, addresses the increasing dissolution of the distance between the mediatized spectacle and so-called reality: "A naïve belief that assumes photography to be a record of reality gets inverted in the mass media, which gives rise to the mass hallucination that whatever is photographed is real. But this also suggests another logical inversion: whatever is not recorded by photography or not broadcast on television is unreal."¹⁵ The word *gen'ei* ("illusion" or "hallucination") used in the title of this essay is a direct reference to the word *image* used in the Japanese translation of Boorstin's book, *The Image: Or What Happened to the American Dream?*¹⁶ Here, Nakahira follows Boorstin's observation that the very process of televisual mediation gives rise to "pseudo-events." For Nakahira, this causal inversion of mediation and event generates "a strange myth . . . whose logic confounds reality and its image."¹⁷ This conflation of reality and its image, moreover, produces a new form of policing power. Once documented and broadcast on television, a simple snapshot of an ordinary house might start to look like a crime scene, and a passerby like

a criminal. It is this imposition of moral judgment unleashed by the image and by newsmaking practice that Nakahira objects to.

Nakahira's critique of the manipulating power of the image forms the perfect obverse of Oshima's observation that the parameters of politics have greatly changed since the emergence of media-savvy student protesters, underlining the fact that the critique of the image was by no means uniform across the Left. Their complementary take on television and its power suggests how ambivalent the mediated appeal of the spectacle could be even for those on the Left who ostensibly share the same critical stance toward politics. The spectacle works not only in favor of one who benefits from the existing structure of domination, but also for those who contest it. For the camera-conscious protesters, the efficacy of direct action resides as much in the indirect process of its dissemination through the media as in the action itself. A clear distinction between directness and indirectness, or the immediacy of action and the mediatedness of its image, becomes untenable. In this Japanese version of the society of the spectacle, what we find is the fundamental ambivalence of the image.

If Nakahira's distrust of television comes close to Guy Debord's well-known critique of the spectacle, Oshima's call to reconceptualize politics in light of the spectacle reminds us of Jacques Rancière's recent critique of Debord's narrow definition of the spectacle as a source of disempowerment.¹⁸ For Oshima, the deliberate act of setting up and staging the protest for the camera is nothing to be denigrated. Mishima, in the dialogue referred to above, assumes that there is an essential difference between a real political action and a theatrical or expressive act (with which he aligns student protests), and would thus seem to be in agreement with Nakahira's critique of the spectacle. Oshima, on the other hand, insists that such a distinction no longer holds. Here, Oshima might be envisioning the relation between politics and the spectacle in the manner comparable to Rancière, who overturns the Platonic prejudice implicit in Debord's negative view of the separation between the spectacle and the spectator.¹⁹ Rancière's understanding of politics as something spectacular is a view that Oshima strongly espouses in his conversation with Mishima and in his filmmaking practice throughout the 1960s. For Oshima, the expressive act of student activists is often immediately political, and politics in turn is radically reconfigured through the dramatic act of staging the spectacle that attempts to dislocate and disrupt the existing police order.

As is evident in the disagreement between Oshima's and Nakahira's critique of television, however, the Japanese leftist discourse on politics and the spectacle in the 1960s and early 1970s is far from uniform: the spectacle is variably viewed as a polemical object of critique as well as a site of empowerment. In short, the problem with the image produced and relayed by television for these critics resides not in its spectacular appearance per se; rather it derives from the end to which it serves. This duality of the image as a means and a medium became, in effect, a recurrent problem for political avant-garde filmmakers. If the mediating function of the image in cinema and television received such intense scrutiny by political avant-garde filmmakers and critics in the 1960s, it is precisely because politics could no longer be thought apart from the fundamental ambivalence of the spectacle. This ambivalence marks the cinema of actuality and thus informs the tension between cinema and journalism.

In order to set up the main framework of analysis, I trace in chapter 1 the genealogy of the term *eizō* ("image") and examine its sudden proliferation in the wake of television. Beginning in the late 1950s, theoretical and popular discourse on cinema in Japan increasingly dealt with the question of cinema's specificity in relation to other forms of image-making media. The concept that played a crucial role here was *eizō*, a term that dominated the debates around image-making practice, and which designates a special class of images produced and mediated by a technological apparatus. This growing concern with the image, which took shape in various forms of image theories from the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, also helped to revive discussions about cinema and its medium specificity. Through a close analysis of Matsumoto's and Oshima's intermedial experiments with still photography and the comic book, I lay the groundwork for the consideration of the cinema of actuality within a wider media-historical context.

The image is, of course, a topic that has received much attention in North America in recent years through the work of theorists such as W. J. T. Mitchell, Anne Friedberg, Jean-Luc Nancy, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Marie-José Mondzain. There has been a growing interest in the status of the image in contemporary societies among scholars of film studies, media studies, cultural studies, and art history, in part because of the growing prominence of digital media that radically re-configured our understanding of the materiality of the image. However, this widely shared interest in the image has been marked by a curious

tendency toward generalization that seems to leave out questions relating to its historical and cultural specificity. Scholars have too often used the word *image* to mean anything from the representation of an object in one's mind to a painting, a photograph, or a computer screen.²⁰ The shortcoming of this approach is that the image comes to encompass anything from an ancient cave painting to a photo displayed on a laptop, all while its implicit rootedness in Judeo-Christian epistemology remains unquestioned. Just as the term *theory* has been assumed to be an exclusive property of the West (Europe and North America), the term *image* in the disciplines of the humanities often presupposes its epistemological roots in this Western or Judeo-Christian tradition. My attempt to map out the genealogy of the term *eizō* is intended to provide an alternative framework of analysis grounded in the historical and cultural conditions of the postwar Japanese media environment.

Accompanying the discourse on the image I discuss in chapter 1 is an equally prominent concern with the concept of actuality. Extending the interrogation of cinema's relation to other media, in chapter 2 I historically situate the tension between cinema and journalism, and ask what was at stake in these cinematic experiments. In order to think through this question, I focus on the connection between theatricality and actuality. Tracing the tension between the documentary understanding of filmic actuality as factuality and the journalistic conception of actuality as topicality, I examine key debates in Japanese film theory surrounding this concept of actuality. These debates inform my analysis of Matsu-moto's and Oshima's timely appropriation of high-profile media events and news in films such as *For the Damaged Right Eye* (1968), *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969), *Death by Hanging* (1968), and *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (1969). Instead of simply reproducing the journalistic sensation of actuality, these films, which often directly appropriate and "remediate" topical media events, reveal the constitutive artifice at the heart of actuality, or what I call "artifactuality" (following Jacques Derrida).²¹

In chapter 3 I extend the investigation of artifactuality by highlighting the temporal difference between two economies of the image: journalism and cinema. The markedly experimental "Pink" or softcore films by Wakamatsu Kōji, which consciously and swiftly appropriate contemporary media events, provide a unique vantage point to analyze this difference. Wakamatsu's films from the 1960s and early 1970s play with a well-calculated timing of the cinematic appropriation of media events that generated an intense sensation of actuality. By situating Wakama-

tsu's practice within the larger political climate of the time, I explore how this mode of cinematic intervention was responding to the increasing mediatization of politics—both left wing *and* right wing—that television facilitated.

In chapter 4 I return to the relation between cinema and journalism, this time with an emphasis on the way in which this relation was problematized in the film discourse of the *fūkeiron* (“theory of landscape” or “landscape theory”) and its attendant filmic works: A.K.A. *Serial Killer* (1969), an experimental documentary film shot by Adachi, and *The Man Who Left His Will on Film* (1970), an experimental narrative film shot by Oshima. These two films and the concomitant discourse of *fūkeiron* added a new dimension to Japanese film theory, as they approached the image of landscape in terms of state power, and governmental control over urban space in particular. By drawing attention to the formal similarity between the actuality films of early cinema and these two landscape films, I show how the formal strategy of focusing on empty landscapes helped these filmmakers to develop a new framework for analyzing the policing power of the state.

In chapter 5 I investigate a case in which the cinema of actuality directly confronted television. In this chapter I closely analyze Wakamatsu and Adachi's singular propaganda news film, *The Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War* (1971), which opens with remediated news footage of airplane hijackings. Comparing *The Red Army/PFLP's* use of televisual news and images of the landscape to the remarkably similar work *Here and Elsewhere* (1974), a film shot by Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin, and Anne-Marie Miéville, I examine how these films complicate the ideal of militant cinema. Emphasis is placed on the tension between the alleged directness of a militant action, such as hijacking, and the alleged indirectness of the cinematic mediation of such an action.

In the conclusion I map out the eventual decline of the cinema of actuality in relation to two epochal events of the 1970s: the World's Fair in Osaka (Expo 70) held in 1970 and the hostage crisis known as the Asama Sansō Incident in 1972. By tracing the structural transformation in the governmental control over urban space, the policing of the contiguity between street politics and cinema, the rise of video art, and the increasing retreat of image-making practices into enclosed spaces of exhibition, I situate the end of the season of image politics in a wider historical context.

In sum, I take as my point of departure the presupposition that Japanese avant-garde cinema of the 1960s and early 1970s must be situated firmly within its theoretical and its medial contexts. It is thus to the discourse of the image and the burgeoning intermedia practice that I now turn.